

Love One Another: Abide in Love

John 15:1-5; 8-11

Sunday, October 25, 2026

Today's scripture comes right after the scripture we talked about last week. Jesus is still sitting with his disciples at the Passover table. At this point, the meal is over. He's dismissed Judas to do what he's going to do. He knows his time with them is short. Once he's gone, it's going to be up to them to continue his ministry. So, he's taking this last opportunity to prepare them to do just that: continue his ministry.

And in this scripture, he uses a metaphor for that ministry that they would have been very familiar with: the metaphor of growing grapes. Grapes were important in Jesus' day. Most everyone drank at least some wine because it was healthier than the water. Now, there's no indication that any of the disciples actually grew grapes, but they certainly would have seen them grown and been very familiar with how the process worked.

But even beyond that, they would have been familiar with the image of the vine and the grapes from their scripture, what we call the Old Testament. Quite often in the Old Testament, we see wine used to represent joy, and life. We even see this in chapter 2 of John's Gospel, when Jesus turns the water at the wedding banquet in Cana into wine.

But even more than the image of Joy and life, we see the Old Testament authors using the image of the vineyard to represent Israel. In this image, God is the one who plants the vineyard, and Israel—the Jewish people—are the vine. It was their job to bear the fruit of a relationship with their God, so that through them, the whole world would be blessed. They were to be source of joy and life for the whole world.

But, as often happens with us human beings, they misunderstood the assignment. Instead of living in joyous communion with their God and inviting the rest of the world to participate, they made their relationship with God all about following ever more detailed and intricate rules. And at the same time, they made their faith all about themselves. Those who followed the rules were in, and everyone else (which was the rest of the world) was out. As God's vineyard, they had failed to produce any fruit.

So, in today's scripture, Jesus points out to his disciples—and us—that it's no longer the nation of Israel that is God's vine, it's him; *he* is the **true** vine. He is the realization of God's plan for the redemption of the human race.

And then he begins to talk about what the plan looks like. And it doesn't look like following rules. It doesn't look like turning in upon themselves and making their lives all about themselves. Instead, it looks like abiding. He says to them, "abide in me."

So, what does that mean? Well, he illustrates what he's talking about with this beautiful Old Testament image of the grapevine and the branches. But he uses the image to make a slightly different point. He points out that for the branches to have life, they must be connected to—they must abide in—the vine. And so, just as the grape branches' connection to the vine enables them to receive the nutrients they need to live, the disciples' connection to Jesus enables them to receive the spiritual nourishment they'll need to follow him and be his disciples.

And what we discover as we read through the rest of John's Gospel is that that kind of spiritual nourishment—that being connected to Jesus—constitutes a new kind of life. It's the

kind of life Jesus talks about as abundant life, new life. In his conversation with the Pharisee Nicodemus in chapter three, he calls it born again life, life born from above. Eternal life.

Now, as I think I've shared before, in Greek, there are two words for "life": bios and zoe. The branches of a grapevine, just like human beings, have bios—physical life. But those who abide in Jesus have something more. Sure, they've got physical life, bios. But they've also got something that, as far as we know, only us humans have the opportunity to possess: spiritual life, eternal life, zoe.

And that new kind of life—that abiding kind of life—necessarily results in fruit. The point of a grapevine is to produce grapes. The point of being a disciple of Jesus and living an eternal kind of life is likewise to produce fruit. Of course, the fruit we are to produce is different. Jesus isn't talking about grapes ... or apples or oranges or peaches for that matter. He's talking about the fruits of the Spirit, as we read about in Galatians 5:22-23: "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control."

And you can see that a life lived with the fruit of the spirit *is* new and different just by looking around. When you're getting pummeled by the political ads, how much love do you see? When you're driving down I-35, how much joy? When you're watching the news, how much peace and patience. When Jesus is talking about living and bearing fruit, he is very clearly talking about a NEW and different kind of life.

So, this abiding in Christ thing is pretty important, right? Which, of course, raises the question, "How exactly do we go about doing it?" Which is what Jesus explains in the second half of today's scripture.

First, he clarifies what abiding means. He tells them that as the Father has loved him, he has loved them. In other words, he has loved them with the divine love of the Holy Trinity.

And then, he tells them that abiding in him means abiding in that love; allowing themselves to become a part of that love; allowing divine love to saturate their beings so that every moment of their lives, that's where and what they're living.

And then he tells them how to do that: by keeping his commandments. Now, as I might have mentioned last week, in John's Gospel he only "commanded" them to do one thing. In fact, in this passage, he doesn't even *command* them to abide in him. He tells them it's the way to eternal life, but he doesn't force them to do it. But, what he's saying here is that if they want some of that eternal life for themselves, there *is* a command they must follow. And we find it in verse 12: "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you." Same commandment we heard last week.

So, the key to the whole thing is love: abiding in Christ's divine love. Loving like Christ loves.

Now, at this point I want to take a breather and address the elephant in the room. All this loving sounds great. But I think most of us sitting here are probably thinking: I can't do that. Much of the time, I can barely muster up simple *tolerance* for the people around me. How on earth am I going to be able to love anyone—even Jesus—with divine, trinitarian, eternal love?

Good question, and the answer is, right now, you probably can't. At that table with Jesus 2,000 years ago, those disciples certainly couldn't. I mean, just a few hours later, they would abandon him. It wasn't until Pentecost, when the Spirit of Christ, the Holy Spirit, began to abide

in them, that they could begin to actually abide in Him; that they could actually begin to love like Jesus loved.

And it's the same for us. As a result of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, when we entrust ourselves to him, we receive that same Spirit. And that's great. But even then, it's not like we suddenly start loving everyone the way Jesus did. As we've often talked about before, becoming like Jesus is a process of spiritual growth that takes a lifetime, and beyond. As Jesus' Spirit abides in us, we work with that Spirit to learn to abide in it; to be transformed more and more over time into the image of Christ, so we can learn more and more to love him and others the same way he loves us.

Which brings it back around to fruit. Ultimately, a life lived abiding in God's love IS the fruit. It's what leads to the joy, peace, patience, kindness, and so on. It's the source, and the expression, of a fundamentally changed life; an eternal life.

And, when we live that kind of life, people notice, and they want some of that fruit for themselves. That's what Jesus means in verse 8 when he says, "My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and be [become] my disciples." As valuable and important as it is for each one of us individually to live the eternal kind of life—to live the fruit of the Spirit in our own lives—it's equally important for us to share that fruit with others. That's what it means to be a disciple of Jesus: to abide in him and, by living in his love, to invite others to do the same; to invite others into the eternal sort of lives we are living.